

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY OSLO

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INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

USMISSION USNATO

CINCUSNAVEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 4166

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL UR NO

SUBJ: SOVIET MISSILE TEST IN BARENTS SEA

REF: OSLO 4014; STATE 222540

1. AS WE INDICATED IN REFTEL, FONMIN FRYDENLUND CONSIDERS SOVIET WEAPON TEST AS FORM OF MUSCLE-FLEXING ON EVE OF NEGOTIATIONS OVER DIVISION OF BARENTS SEA CONTINENTAL SHELF. FONMIN'S CHIEF OF LEGAL SECTION, KJELL ELIASSEN, WHO WILL AGAIN HEAD NORWEGIAN DELEGATION, TOOK MORE NUANCED POSITION IN ADDRESSING NATO COUNSELORS ON SEPT 24, SAYING THAT HE DID NOT CONSIDER MOVE AN EFFORT TO INTIMIDATE NORWAY BUT RATHER TO POINT UP FACT SOVIETS ALSO HAVE INTERESTS IN THIS DISPUTED AREA. IN ANY EVENT, ELIASSEN AFFIRMED HE DID NOT FEEL INTIMIDATED--AND INDEED, HE IS SORT OF NORWEGIAN WHO WOULD DISPLAY NATIONAL STUBBORNESS IF PUSHED DIRECTLY BY SOVIETS. ELIASSEN DUCKED
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QUESTION WHY SOVIETS, WHO HAVE GENERALLY FOLLOWED A MORE SUBTLE,

LOW KEY POLICY IN DEALING WITH NORWEGIANS IN RECENT YEARS, SHOULD RESORT TO MUSCLE FLEXING IN CONNECTION WITH UPCOMING TALKS. (ELIASSEN CONFIRMED THAT NO PRECISE DATE HAS BEEN SET FOR TALKS BEYOND AGREEMENT ON NOVEMBER DECEMBER PERIOD, ADDING THAT NORWEGIANS HAD PROPOSED NOV. 24).

2. SINCE NORWEGIANS ARE TAKING VERY STRICT LEGALIST APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS, BASING THEMSELVES ON 1958 CONTINENTAL SHELF CONVENTION, IT IS POSSIBLE USSR CHOSE TO PAY THEM BACK IN KIND BY PRESENTING THEM WITH AMBIGUOUS MILITARY ACTION WHICH IS QUITE LEGAL UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW SINCE TEST OCCURRED IN AREA DEFINED AS HIGH SEAS. ELIASSEN EXPANDED SOMEWHAT ON PREVIOUS EXPLANATION OF DEMARCHE IN MOSCOW TO SAY THAT NORWEGIANS HAD TOLD SOVIETS THEY APPRECIATED TEST WAS STRICTLY LEGAL BUT RAN COUNTER TO TACIT UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES TO USE RESTRAINT IN MATTERS OF CONCERN TO THE OTHER, IN THIS CASE NORWEGIAN FISHING AND SHIPPING.

3. ALL EVIDENCE POINTS TO FACT THAT TEST WAS DELIBERATE POLITICAL STEP, DESIGNED AT MINIMUM TO UNDERSCORE SOVIET INTEREST IN DISPUTED AREA. THIS IS FIRST TIME THAT THIS IMPACT AREA HAS BEEN CHOSEN FOR A MISSILE TEST. ONLY PREVIOUS TEST WE RECALL IN BARENTS SEA INVOLVED MISSILE SHOT FROM FAR EAST AROUND 1972, BUT THE IMPACT AREA WAS MUCH CLOSER TO SOVIET MAINLAND WHERE IT IS EASIER FOR SOVIETS TO MONITOR RESULTS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE SOVIETS PLAN LONG-RANGE ICBM TEST THIS TIME, AND THE SHORTER-RANGE ROUTINE MISSILE SHOTS WHICH HAVE OCCURRED WOULD BE MUCH BETTER CONDUCTED CLOSER TO SHORE FOR MONITORING PURPOSES.

5. THERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH COULD EXPLAIN SOVIET SELECTION OF IMPACT SITE BEYOND DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR LEGAL POSITION IN UPCOMING TALKS. IN NORWEGIAN CONTEXT, SOVIETS WERE CERTAINLY IRRITATED BY PRIME MINISTER BRATTELI'S QUITE POINTED COMMENTS DIRECTED AT THEM IN SPEECH ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NORWEGIAN SOVEREIGNTY ON SVALBARD. WE ARE NOT IN POSITION TO JUDGE WHETHER THERE ARE LARGER CONSIDERATIONS IN CONTEXT OF CSCE AND POSSIBLE DOMESTIC DEBATE IN USSR OVER DETENTE TACTICS. WE NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT SEPT 11 ANNOUNCEMENT OF SOVIET TEST FOLLOWED AUG 22 ANNOUNCEMENT OF "GROS ROCHADE" MANEUVERS IN GERMANY, WHICH EVIDENTLY DISPLEASED SOVIETS. BOTH THESE EVENTS COULD BE CONFIDENTIAL

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REASONS WHY SOVIETS WOULD FEEL IT TACTICALLY DESIRABLE TO TAKE FIRM POSITION IN UPCOMING TALKS.

5. BUT UNLESS SOVIET ACTION FITS INTO SOME EMERGING PATTERN OF TOUGHER BEHAVIOR, WE WOULD ASSUME ROCKET TEST HAD ESSENTIALLY LIMITED OBJECTIVE AND SOVIETS WILL REVERT TO PRIMARY RELIANCE ON CARROT IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH NORWEGIANS. THEY ARE WELL AWARE THAT GEOGRAPHY PROVIDES AN UNSPOKEN REMINDER TO NORWEGIANS THAT

STICK IS NEAR AT HAND. IN CONTEXT OF UPCOMING NEGOTIATIONS,
HOWEVER, WE DOUBT THAT TEST WAS VERY HELPFUL TO SOVIET POSITION.
BYRNE

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